



NETHERLANDS HELSINKI COMMITTEE

## Statement on OSCE Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

12 June 2014



The Netherlands Helsinki Committee welcomes the Guidelines on the Protection for Human Rights Defenders, issued on 10 June 2014 by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE. During the launch conference of the Guidelines in Bern, NHC Executive Director Harry Hummel announced a new campaign for the release of Ales Bialiatski. Bialiatski is the head of Viasna, a leading Belarusian human rights NGO, and serves a four year prison sentence. In a number of other OSCE participating States, human rights defenders have also been sentenced to long prison terms.

"The defense of human rights by concerned, committed and critical citizens is an important and necessary contribution to human rights compliance in any country", Harry Hummel said. "The Guidelines indicate, based on existing international standards, which obligations states have to allow civil society to make this contribution. They also offer advice on how to optimally enable civil society in this role. Together with our colleagues in the Civic Solidarity Platform, which had advocated for these Guidelines since 2012, the NHC will actively contribute to stimulating the use by OSCE participating States of the Guidelines."

He urged all OSCE participating States that care about security of human rights defenders to step up efforts on behalf of human rights defenders at risk in other countries, making this a key issue in all bilateral and multilateral fora. "But all states should also review their own policies. The European Union and its member states

should not only address the issue in their foreign affairs. A number of speakers at the conference also pointed to repression inside the EU of people, including whistleblowers, who raise concerns about government policies which they see as unjust."